DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 350 908 HE 025 885

AUTHOR Mehrotra, Chandra M.
TITLE Strengthening Undergraduate Education in Aging through Faculty Enhancement.
PUB DATE 15 Aug 92
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (100th, Washington, DC, August 15, 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Aging Education; Attitude Change; College Faculty; *College Instruction; *Faculty Development; Higher Education; *Institutes (Training Programs); Knowledge Level; Professional Continuing Education; Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; Psychology; Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

An assessment of a psychology faculty enhancement program which provided up-to-date information on aging was done. In 1989/90 the program involved a 2-week institute for 25 teachers from two-year and four-year colleges, providing them with consultation both during and after the institute, and maintaining contact with them through reunions and newsletters. A 1-week follow-up institute was held in 1991 and attended by 18 of the original group. Assessment was conducted by monitoring all of the activities, by collecting data on participants' knowledge and attitudes before and after the institute, and by administering evaluation questionnaires at the end of each institute. The participants showed a statistically significant change on a knowledge test and on three attitude scales. They also rated the program as a whole very highly. Responses on the follow-up questionnaire indicated that as a result of participating in this program they had developed a stronger sense of the value of incorporating aging in the curriculum, had read more about aging, had incorporated new material in their courses, and had become more involved in aging-related activities. In addition, a large number of participants had maintained contact with distinguished visiting professors and with colleagues from other schools. The program received support from the National Science Foundation. (JB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED350908

STRENGTHENING UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION IN AGING THROUGH FACULTY ENHANCEMENT

Chandra M. Mehrotra

College of St. Scholastica

Presented at

The 100th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association

August 15, 1992 Washington, D.C.

HE 025 885

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Chandra Mehrotra

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

In view of the continued increase in the older population and the rapid advances in knowledge related to aging, we have developed a comprehensive faculty enhancement program to enable psychology instructors to incorporate up-to-date content on aging in their courses. With support provided by the National Science Foundation we conducted a two-week institute for 25 teachers from 2-year and 4-year colleges, provided them with consultation both during and after the institute, maintained contact with them through reunions and newsletters, and organized a follow-up institute to allow them to share their new efforts. Assessment of the program was conducted by monitoring all of the activities, by collecting data on participants' knowledge and attitudes before and after the two-week institute, and by administering evaluation questionnaires at the end of each institute. The participants showed a statistically significant change on the knowledge test, and on three of the attitude scales. While they rated some sessions more positively than others, they gave extremely high ratings to the program as a whole. The responses on the follow-up questionnaire indicate that as a result of participating in this program they have developed a stronger sense of the value of incorporating aging in the curriculum, have read much more about aging than they used to do before, have incorporated new material in their courses, and have become much more involved in aging-related activities on their campus. In addition, a large number of participants have maintained contact with distinguished visiting professors and with colleagues from other schools. In light of these positive results similar programs of faculty renewal may be developed for enhancing the quality of scholarship and teaching in other areas of psychology.

STRENGTHENING UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION IN AGING THROUGH FACULTY ENHANCEMENT

This is the age of aging. Profound demographic shifts are pushing the average age of the population upward, and this trend is like to continue. This means that higher education, mainly at the undergraduate level, will need to include aging related content in the curriculum. However a large number of college teachers obtained their Ph.D.'s in the early 1970's, a period when very few graduate schools emphasized aging as an important part of the curriculum in psychology. A national study recently reported that only 35 percent of community college teachers and 48 percent of instructors from four-year colleges had done formal course work in gerontology during their degree programs (Peterson, Douglass, Bolton, Connelly, and Bergstrom, 1987). Furthermore, the past twenty years have been a period of unusual advances in our knowledge about aging. The rate of generation of new knowledge and techniques and the theoretical and methodological sophistication is reflected in the quality and the number of papers submitted to journals and to annual conventions of relevant professional associations. Indeed, the number of journals, newsletters, and books on aging has grown substantially during the past twenty years. Yet, unfortunately, faculty members often do not have the background necessary to include new scholarship and scientific advances in the undergraduate curriculum. Heavy teaching loads, work on department and college-wide committees, and advising students leave little time for college teachers to keep themselves abreast of current development in the specialized area of aging.

In order to address these needs of psychology faculty a comprehensive faculty enhancement program was developed with the support provided by the National Science Foundation's Division of Undergraduate Education. In this paper, we provide a description of this program and its impact upon the participants.

Program Objectives

The chief purpose of the program was to enhance the quality of undergraduate education by providing the 25 participants with knowledge of recent developments in various aspects of aging and sharing with them effective methods to present this knowledge to their undergraduate students. Specific objectives include: (a) to strengthen the participants' disciplinary expertise in psychology of aging; (b) to enhance their skills in presenting up-to-date materials in aging to their undergraduate students; (c) to provide the participants with opportunities to interact intensively with experts in the field and with colleagues from other institutions.

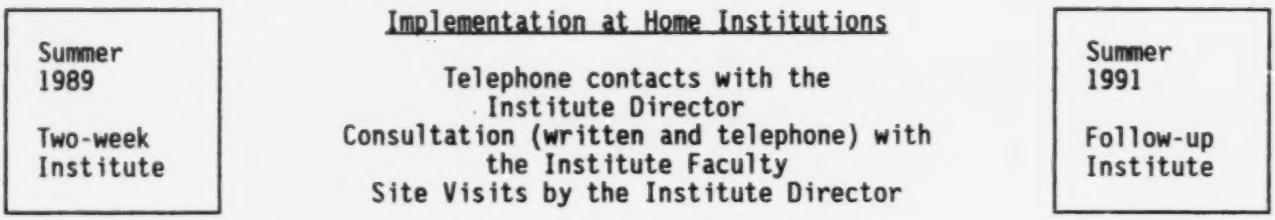

Figure 1. Program Design

Program Design

As shown in Figure 1, the program was comprised of three major elements: (a) a two-week institute at The College of St. Scholastica in Summer 1989 attended by 25 teachers from 2-year and 4-year colleges; (b) consultation and reunion during the year 1989-90; and (c) a follow-up institute in Summer 1991.

Content and Format

The topics covered at the 1989 institute include: lifespan developmental psychology, sensation and perception, cognitive processes, environment and aging, assessing older adults, neuropsychology of aging, evaluation research, personality development, and work and retirement. Distinguished visiting professors who have done significant amount of teaching and research were invited to give presentations in the area of their specialization. Each day in the two-week institute followed a similar format. The daily schedule consisted of two 2 1/2 hour class sessions, with free time between them for lunch and consultation with visiting professors. Two class sessions were devoted to each of the topics listed above. The presentations included both the content and the instructional strategies useful in presenting the materials to undergraduates. In addition, the participants visited three different types of homes for older adults: a nursing home located on our campus; a board and lodging facility connected with a senior center; and a home for people with Alzheimer's disease. Since all of the participants and the visiting professors stayed on our campus it provided excellent opportunities for them to have informal interactions at meals and other free times. In addition, the participants spent a considerable amount of time in studying original source materials related to the topics covered in the presentations. This allowed them to become familiar with library resources which will be helpful to them in incorporating recent developments in their courses on a continuing basis.

Follow-up Activities

A number of follow-up activities were conducted during 1989-90 and 1990-91 to maintain contact with the participants, to provide them with continuing support in their new efforts, to cover additional topics suggested by the participants, and to stimulate collaboration among them. Such follow-up activities have been found to contribute

significantly in strengthening the effectiveness of faculty renewal programs (Menges, 1985). Brief description of these activities follows.

Reunion. We organized a breakfast meeting at the 1989 convention of the Gerontological Society of America. Five of the visiting professors and twelve participants were able to join us at this reunion. The participants gave a progress report on how they have developed new courses and incorporated aging-related material in their existing courses.

The visiting professors provided the participants with an update on the research they are currently conducting.

Newsletters. Two newsletters were prepared during 1989-90: one on textbooks and the other on teaching older adults. Both of them were well received by the participants. We are currently planning to do a newsletter on aging-related films useful in teaching undergraduate courses.

Consultation. The institute director and the visiting professors have continued to provide consultation and other support to the participants. Examples: (a) one of the visiting professors has served as a guest lecturer in classes taught by two of the participants; (b) the director has visited a participant at her home institution, has reviewed her course materials, and has suggested new assessment tools for use by her students; and (c) the director and the institute faculty have assisted two of the participants in obtaining support for their sabbatical with the goal of conducting aging-related projects.

Follow-up Institute. A survey was conducted in Fall 1990 to determine the participants' interest in a week-long institute. Utilizing the findings of this survey a follow-up institute was organized in Summer 1991. Eighteen participants came back to attend this institute. In addition to learning about two new topics (mental health and aging and cross-cultural aspects of aging), the participants gave presentations on how they have incorporated what they had learned at the 1989 institute.

Program Evaluation

Evaluation of the program was conducted by monitoring all of the activities, by collecting data on participants' knowledge and attitudes before and after the 1989 institute, and administering evaluation questionnaires at the end of each institute. The director monitored the conduct of the activities by attending all of the sessions. This was done to determine the extent to which (a) the material was presented at an appropriate level; (b) it encouraged active learning on the part of the participants; and (c) there was a good match between what was proposed and what was actually presented. Effectiveness of the program was examined in terms of the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.

Knowledge. We assessed the participants' knowledge both before and after the institute by administering (a) a test which was developed with the assistance of the institute faculty to cover the specific material taught at the institute; (b) the Mental Health and Aging test by Pruchno and Smyer; and (c) The Facts on Aging Quiz by Palmore (1977). The participants showed a statistically significant change on the knowledge test ($t = 6.97$, $p < .01$).

Attitudes. Participants' attitudes were assessed by administering (a) Attitude Toward Old People Scale (Kogan, 1961); (b) Functionalistic Ethic by Sherman; (c) Opinion about People (OAP) -- Anxiety (Ontario Welfare Council, 1971); (d) OAP --Denial; (e) OAP -- Public Responsibility; (f) OAP -- Realistic Toughness; (g) OAP -- Social Distance; and (h) OAP -- Stereotypes. Out of these eight measures statistically significant changes were found on functionalistic ethic ($t = 2.94$, $p < .01$), denial ($t = 2.49$, $p < .05$), and unfair stereotypes ($t = 2.37$, $p < .05$).

Behaviors. Changes in participants' behavior were assessed by asking questions about their intentions to teach courses on aging. These questions were included in the Institute Evaluation Form that was completed by all participants at the end of the summer institute. This questionnaire also asked them to rate different aspects of the institute and to report the extent to which the institute had been beneficial to them in (a) learning new facts, (b) gaining new enthusiasm to include aging in the curriculum, (c) getting to know distinguished professionals in the field of aging, and (d) interacting with colleagues from other schools. The institute received an overall rating of 3.77 on a four-point scale. The participants indicated that they had acquired new knowledge for strengthening their teaching, research, and service efforts related to aging. Another evaluation form administered in July 1991 provided additional information on how the participants have utilized what they learned at the 1989 summer institute. Brief summary of their responses follows.

As indicated in Table 1, almost all of the respondents indicated that as a result of participating in this program they have developed a stronger sense of the value of incorporating aging in the curriculum, have read much more about aging than they used to do before, have incorporated new materials in their courses, and have become more

Table 1

Program Impact on Professional Activities

Activities	Responses				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
Incorporated new material in my courses	0	0	5	9	3.64
Added new course(s) on aging	1	4	2	4	2.82
Conducted workshops on aging in the community	2	4	5	3	2.64
Initiated research on aging-related topics	2	3	3	6	2.93
Became more involved in aging-related activities on my campus	0	0	7	8	3.53
Developed contact with colleagues from other schools	0	1	4	10	3.60
Developed contact with distinguished visiting faculty	2	4	1	8	3.00
Began subscribing to gerontological journal(s)	1	5	2	7	3.00
Have a stronger sense of the value of incorporating aging in the curriculum	0	0	2	13	3.87
Read much more about aging than I used to do before	0	0	2	13	3.87

involved in aging-related activities on their campus. A large number of the participants said that they have maintained contact with distinguished visiting professors and with colleagues from other schools. About half of the respondents reported that they have begun subscribing to gerontological journals and have initiated research on aging-related topics.

Participants' Activities. As reported above, the NSF Institute has stimulated the participants to undertake aging-related teaching and research activities they would not have initiated otherwise. Examples include: (a) A tenured full professor from a state university took a sabbatical leave and visited Sweden, the Netherlands, and Germany to meet with professors of gerontology at institutions of higher education, to visit day care and other community facilities for older adults, and to tour housing especially designed for senior citizens; (b) An assistant professor from a single person department in a small liberal arts college in a rural community conducted a series of workshops for service providers from rural nursing homes and other facilities for older adults; (c) An associate professor from a private university conducted a research project investigating health problems among 466 women, ages ranging from 60 to 99, in rural counties of North Dakota; and (d) Finally, three of the participants have recently developed a proposal for conducting a multi-site research study of older women representing three different ethnic groups.

In short, the NSF program has changed participants' perspectives on aging in a variety of ways. As one participant indicated: "I now have a broader perspective (particularly after the presentation on cross-cultural aspects of aging). I have become more interested in aging. I am intrigued and am thinking about ways to engage in further study in the field. This has led to improvements in my performance in teaching courses

on aging and in incorporating content and techniques in other classes." Another participant said that "the support from the institute colleagues has been an unbelievable lift, emotionally, intellectually, and professionally. The professional isolation in a single person department located in a rural community definitely affects quality of teaching. The encouragement, support, and intellectual stimulation from this group has been unbelievable." In light of these positive results similar programs of faculty renewal may be developed for enhancing the quality of scholarship and teaching in other areas of psychology.

References

Kogan, N. (1961). Attitudes toward old people: the development of a scale and an examination of Correlates. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 62*, 44-54.

Menges, R.J. (1985, April). *The Stanford program for faculty renewal: evaluation of workshops and reunions.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

Ontario Welfare Council, Section on Aging (1971). *Opinions about people, form a: guidelines and manual* (for an instrument dealing with attitudes toward aging and the aged for use in educational and training programs in the field of aging).

Peterson, D.A., Douglass, E., Bolton, C.R., Connelly, R., & Bergstone, D. (1987). *Gerontology instruction in American institutions of higher education: a national survey.* Washington, D.C.: Association for Gerontology in Higher Education.

Palmore, E. (1977). Facts on aging: a short quiz. *The Gerontologist, 17*, 315-20.